

WATER

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# Town gets improved marks for water conservation

But Audubon Society is still watching closely

By Paula R. Hastings  
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DUXBURY — After being socked with some of the most stringent permit restrictions in history, the town's Department of Public Works said Duxbury is becoming a model of water conservation programs.

"We have proven ourselves. We stand out as a success story," said DPW director Wally Tonzuck.

According to the Water Management Act of 1985 that went

into effect five years later, if a town wants to take 100,000 gallons of water per day from the ground, it has to get a permit from the state.

In considering a town's request, the state Department of Environmental Management makes a projection of needs based on past usage plus population requirements for the next 20 years. Limits on withdrawal are written into the permit issued.

Duxbury had been under a prior water withdrawal permit to take approximately 1.5 million gallons per day from the aquifer, and drew from nine wells to get it. But the previous permit had expired, and demand for water had increased, with 1.82 million gallons a day being used.

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File photo

**Pumped up** — DPW director Wally Tonzuck says Duxbury's water conservation is "a success story."

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Tonzuck said a change needed to be made.

"We had a permit we weren't living within. We had to either live within the permit or get a new one," Tonzuck said.

Town officials approached the Massachusetts Water Resources Commission, asking for an increased level of withdrawal. The commission granted a permit to the town in June 1995 to increase its withdrawal to 1.85 million gallons a day, well short of the 2.15 million gallons per day the town requested. The permit expires in the year 2015.

Lou Wagner, water resources specialist for the Massachusetts Audubon Society, one of the organizations represented on the commission, said the ruling was based on the premise that the town's request was excessive, more than projected population

growth would require, and that water conservation measures should be intensified. Specifically targeted was the outdoor watering that gives the town its green lawns.

"The automatic in-ground systems waste water. They come on even when it's raining," Wagner said.

As a condition of the permit, the commission is requiring monitoring of the area affected by any additional water withdrawal.

Permit in hand, in December the town began using a well named Mayflower II that it had dug next to the Massachusetts Audubon Society's North Hill Wildlife Sanctuary's 90-acre, groundwater-fed pond. The society says the pond supports an abundance of wildlife as well as several threatened and endangered species of aquatic plants.



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"It's a beautiful spot in May or June, alive with water shield, wood ducks, spotted salamanders, and spotted turtles," said Wagner.

David Clapp, director of Mass. Audubon in Marshfield, said the pond level is now very low, but he's in a wait-and-see mode.

"I am waiting for data from state-mandated monitoring to see what effect the well, named Mayflower II, may be having on the pond," Clapp said.

Wagner said the town is required to conduct an ongoing biological monitoring program to note any changes in plant life around the pond.

"They will be monitoring vegetation changes to see if there is a change in the hydrology in the area that would also affect wildlife," Wagner said.

Tonaszuck said the town has hired a consultant to inventory plant life at the pond.

Monitoring test results will be available in December, said Wagner.

Wagner faults the state for taking the easy way out until recently when towns wanted more water, but says the situation is getting better.

"Unfortunately, the ongoing philosophy in water supply management has been that if you need more water, you just go get it. Never mind that there may be leaks in water pipes and that people are wasting water. And there was not a great deal of enforcement of conservation requirements, either. But this is changing, slowly," said Wagner.

Wagner sees the Duxbury permit as evidence of the commission's change in philosophy.

"It's the first time I've seen a town held accountable for implementing...the water conservation measures in their...permits," Wagner said.

Wagner said the Department of Environmental Protection is to be commended for negotiating a permit for Duxbury.

"The Department of Environmental Protection brought the two sides together. We made significant progress. The town has to go before the commission to report monitoring results and conservation efforts," Wagner said.

This year's cool, wet summer has reduced the need to draw water for lawns, Tonaszuck said, but the town is informing residents of the need to become aware of waste in their watering programs.

"We are publishing information to help customers become more knowledgeable on outside watering and turf management," Tonaszuck said, adding that a consultant will offer a course on the subject to residents this fall.

Tonaszuck said that as a result of conservation measures — locating leaks in pipes, replacing old meters, targeting and discouraging high-water users, instituting mandatory water bans with fines for violations, and reducing unaccounted-for water — usage is down this year.

"The usage level is down this year to what our old permit allowed. If we had been given two more years, we could have stayed within the old permit," Tonaszuck said.

Given reduced water usage claimed by the town, added to the ample rain this summer, Clapp said he wonders why the water level in the pond is not higher.

"Considering everything, I was quite startled to see the water level so low," he said.

Tonaszuck is philosophical about the limits the new permit imposes.

"We have said from the beginning we want to do the right thing. Water management is the wave of the future. People support it. It is a way for the town to become more accountable," Tonaszuck said.

Wagner said that Duxbury is not the only town where this kind of controversy is coming up, citing the Ipswich River basin as another area where water supply is being threatened.

Tonaszuck said the state is using the town as a model for designing permits with monitoring requirements.

"They are looking at us as a gauge for communities with the same problems as us. We were the first," Tonaszuck said.

But the DPW official said keeping municipalities out of the state permitting process makes an unnecessary them-against-us conflict.

"Audubon, fisheries and wildlife, environmental protection — the regulatory special interests — are represented on the Water Resources Commission. But the end-users, municipalities, who are being criticized, are not. It is a problem with them seeing us as the enemy," Tonaszuck said.